



Test Ninjas

VOCABULARY STUDY SERIES

SAT VOCABULARY

SAT Vocabulary: Difficulty & Complexity

38 focused words in Difficulty & Complexity

38

UNIQUE WORDS

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CATEGORIES

SAT

EXAM FOCUS



About this study guide

This vocabulary guide was prepared and published by Test Ninjas as an independent study resource. It is designed to help students build the precise word knowledge needed for demanding academic reading and reasoning.

How to use this guide

Study in short, repeated sessions. Read each definition, say the word aloud, and use the example to understand how the word functions in context. Return to unfamiliar words until you can explain them without looking at the definition.

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001 accessible *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

easy to approach, reach, or use

The new building design makes all facilities **accessible** to people with disabilities, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: An access ramp makes a building accessible: easy to approach, reach, and use.

002 arduous *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

requiring great effort; difficult and tiring

The **arduous** climb to the mountain summit took twelve hours, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: Pushing a boulder uphill is arduous: difficult, tiring, and demanding great effort.

ALSO · ADJECTIVE: involving strenuous effort; difficult

003 awkward *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

causing difficulty or discomfort; clumsy

There was an **awkward** silence after the controversial comment, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: Picture a giraffe squeezed into a tiny elevator: clumsy, uncomfortable, and awkward.

004 complexity *noun*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

the state of having many interconnected parts

The **complexity** of the issue requires careful analysis, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: Complexity looks like a machine with many gears connected to one another.

005 complicate *verb*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

to make something more difficult or complex

Additional requirements will only **complicate** the approval process, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: To complicate a straight rope, tie more and more knots into it.

006 complicated *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

consisting of many interconnecting parts; difficult to understand

The instructions were too **complicated** for most users to follow, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: A complicated machine has many interlocking parts and no obvious path through them.

007 **delicate** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

easily broken or damaged; requiring careful handling

The **delicate** porcelain vase required extra padding during shipping, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A delicate glass flower needs careful hands because it can break easily.

008 **demanding** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

requiring much skill, effort, or attention

Medical school is a **demanding** program that requires years of dedication, showing how **demanding** the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A demanding climb consumes skill, effort, and close attention at every step.

009 **easily** *adverb*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

without difficulty or effort; readily

She **easily** solved the puzzle that had stumped everyone else, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: An open, obstacle-free door lets the task pass easily and without effort.

010 **elusive** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

difficult to find, catch, or achieve; hard to remember or define

The **elusive** butterfly evaded capture despite our best efforts, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: An elusive butterfly slips out of the net whenever someone tries to catch it.

011 **facile** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

appearing easy or effortless; superficial or oversimplified

His **facile** explanation failed to address the complexity of the issue, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A facile answer slides easily across the surface but never digs into the real complexity.

ALSO · ADJECTIVE: easily achieved; superficial

012 **feasible** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

possible and practical to accomplish; likely to succeed

The engineers determined that the project was technically **feasible**, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A feasible plan crosses both bridges marked POSSIBLE and PRACTICAL.

013 grapple *verb*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

to struggle or wrestle with something; to try to deal with a difficult problem

Scientists continue to **grapple** with the complexities of climate change, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: Grappling with a problem is wrestling it to the ground instead of avoiding it.

014 incomplete *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

not having all the necessary parts; unfinished

The application was rejected because it was **incomplete**, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: An incomplete puzzle still has an empty space where a necessary piece belongs.

015 insurmountable *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

too great to be overcome; impossible to surmount

The team faced seemingly **insurmountable** obstacles but persevered, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: An insurmountable wall rises beyond every ladder, too high to overcome.

016 intricate *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

very complicated or detailed; having many interconnected parts

The watchmaker carefully assembled the **intricate** mechanism, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: An intricate clock exposes hundreds of tiny, detailed, interconnected gears.

017 nuanced *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

characterized by subtle distinctions or variations

The debate requires a **nuanced** understanding of both sides of the issue, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A nuanced color strip contains subtle shades instead of only black and white.

018 rudimentary *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

involving or limited to basic principles; at an early stage of development

He has only a **rudimentary** understanding of computer programming, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A rudimentary skill is the first rough rung, limited to basic principles.

ALSO · ADJECTIVE: involving basic principles; elementary

019 **simple** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

easily understood or done; not elaborate or complicated

The instructions were **simple** enough for anyone to follow, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A simple route is one straight path with no maze or extra machinery.

020 **simply** *adverb*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

in a straightforward or plain manner; merely; just

I **simply** wanted to help, nothing more, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: Simply means taking the plain, straightforward path without additions.

021 **sophisticated** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

having refined worldly knowledge; highly developed and complex

The **sophisticated** technology allows for precise measurements, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: A sophisticated design combines polished refinement with highly developed inner machinery.

022 **straightforward** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

uncomplicated and easy to understand; honest and direct

The solution to the problem was surprisingly **straightforward**, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A straightforward message travels on a straight road: direct, honest, and easy to understand.

ALSO · ADJECTIVE: easy to understand; uncomplicated

023 **struggling** *verb/adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

striving to achieve something in the face of difficulty

Many small businesses are **struggling** to survive, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A climber slipping on a steep slope is struggling against difficulty toward the goal.

024 **labyrinthine** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

like a labyrinth; complicated and confusing

The **labyrinthine** bureaucracy frustrated applicants, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A labyrinthine explanation winds through a maze of confusing turns.

025 convoluted *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

extremely complex and difficult to follow

The **convoluted** plot confused many readers, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: A convoluted path coils into complex loops that are difficult to follow.

026 formidable *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

inspiring fear or respect through being impressively powerful

The team faced a **formidable** opponent, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A formidable fortress inspires both fear and respect through its power.

027 esoteric *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

intended for or understood by only a few

The lecture covered **esoteric** topics in physics, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: An esoteric book opens only for the few people holding its specialized key.

028 byzantine *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

excessively complicated and difficult to understand

The **byzantine** regulations confused everyone, making the challenge more apparent as additional details and constraints emerged.

MEMORY CUE: A byzantine system resembles a palace maze filled with excessive, confusing turns.

029 abstruse *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

difficult to understand; obscure

The philosopher's **abstruse** writings challenged scholars, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: An abstruse text hides its meaning behind a high wall of difficult ideas.

030 recondite *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

dealing with obscure subject matter

The **recondite** references went over most readers' heads, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: A recondite volume sits in the obscure back corner of a specialist's library.

031 **perplexing** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

causing confusion or bewilderment

The **perplexing** puzzle took hours to solve, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A perplexing puzzle surrounds the mind with crossing question marks.

034 **onerous** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

involving heavy obligation; burdensome

The **onerous** regulations made business difficult, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: An onerous duty is a heavy obligation strapped across the shoulders.

032 **bewildering** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

confusing or perplexing

The **bewildering** array of options overwhelmed shoppers, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: Bewildering directions spin the compass and leave every route confused.

035 **grueling** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

extremely tiring and demanding

The **grueling** training program lasted six months, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A grueling course drains the body's battery while demanding continued effort.

033 **daunting** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

seeming difficult to deal with

The **daunting** task required months of work, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: A daunting task rises like a steep cliff before the first step.

036 **taxing** *adjective*

DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY

physically or mentally demanding

The **taxing** work schedule left her exhausted, showing how demanding the task became for the people responsible for completing it.

MEMORY CUE: A taxing problem charges a heavy fee in mental or physical energy.

037 effortless *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

requiring no physical or mental effort

Her **effortless** grace impressed the judges, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

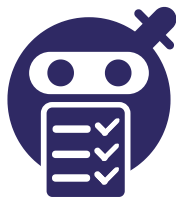
MEMORY CUE: An effortless action floats forward on a feather without strain.

038 elementary *adjective***DIFFICULTY & COMPLEXITY**

relating to the basic elements; simple

The course covers **elementary** principles of chemistry, helping the group recognize which parts of the problem required the greatest effort.

MEMORY CUE: Elementary knowledge forms the simple first blocks of a subject.



SAT VOCABULARY

Keep building your edge.

Vocabulary grows through repeated exposure and deliberate use.
Revisit this list, write with the words, and practice recognizing their
meaning in context.

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